



Notes from Underground

Fyodor Dostoevsky

Study Guide



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Summary

Part I, Chapters IX–XI

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Summary: Chapter IX

The Underground Man suddenly implies that everything he has said in the last few chapters has all been a bitter joke. Nonetheless, he continues to wonder if it is in man's best interest to act for his own profit. He admits that man feels a compulsion to create, but that he feels an equally strong urge to destroy. Animals delight in the creations they have made, as ants delight in an anthill they have built. Man, on the other hand, takes pleasure only in the creative *process*, never in its end result. Man senses that after he fully achieves all of his goals, there will be nothing left to do, and so he fears that achievement. To man, then, the full illumination that logic offers is alarming.

Then the Underground Man wonders whether suffering is not just as valuable to mankind as the well-being achieved through the use of reason. He states that suffering is the cause of consciousness. Though he has complained about consciousness before, he thinks that consciousness surpasses reason. Reason may solve all the world's problems, but then man is left with nothing to do. Consciousness renders man immobile, but allows him to "occasionally whip" himself, which at least "liven[s] things up a bit."

Summary: Chapter X

The Underground Man mocks the utopian fascination with the idea of the crystal palace, an indestructible edifice that epitomizes rationality. He fears the crystal palace because he is unable to stick his tongue out at it. He then mentions that if the palace were a chicken coop, he would

use it for shelter, but never call it a palace. If he desired a crystal palace, he would refuse to accept anything less—such as the mundane accommodations of city life—than that palace. If no one pays attention to his desires, he always has the underground.

Suddenly, the Underground Man wants us to forget that he rejected the crystal palace. He wonders if he was only upset because he has nothing at which to stick out his tongue. He wonders why he desires things like crystal palaces when he should be content with apartments, thinking his desire might be some cruel hoax. He then remarks that those who live underground like him never stop talking once they start, even though they have been silent for years.

Summary: Chapter XI

The last chapter of the “Underground” section of the novel begins with the Underground Man’s resolution that the “conscious inertia” of the underground surpasses the life of the normal man. Nonetheless, he continues to envy the normal man bitterly. In the next moment, he declares that he is lying, and that in fact he believes nothing of what he has written so far, even if at the time he thought that he believed it. This statement is followed by a long speech by the Underground Man’s imagined, outraged audience, who chastises him for his inconsistency, his lack of integrity, his cowardice in refusing to stand by any of his statements, and his general depravity.

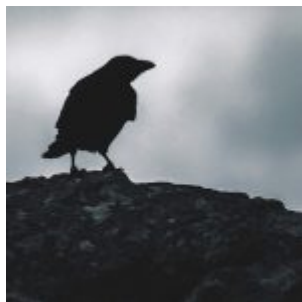
The Underground Man responds that he has made up the audience’s entire speech. He wonders if the audience is “indeed so gullible” as to think that he will publish his notes and allow them to be read. Then he wonders why he addresses the audience at all when he does not plan to let them read the notes. He explains that the notes are his attempt to confront those memories and

thoughts that he has trouble revealing even to himself. Addressing an audience is merely a formal construction to help him to write. He decides that perhaps he uses this imaginary audience because he is a coward, or else in order to “behave more decently” while writing.

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**The Underground Man: Character Analysis**

CHARACTERS

**Important Quotations Explained**

QUOTES

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